

Mapping the Transfer Landscape for California Community College Students



THROUGH THE GATE TRANSFER STUDY | RESEARCH BRIEF 1 | OCTOBER 2017

A Fresh Take on the Transfer Continuum

Increasing transfer success in California Community Colleges (CCC) requires a fresh take. Many students enter the system hoping to transfer, and the California Community College Chancellor's Office new Vision for Success, the growing guided pathways movement, and the recent implementation of the Associate Degree for Transfer (AD-T) all aim to help more students reach this goal. The RP Group's *Through the Gate* study is taking a new approach to informing the transfer challenge in California — zeroing in on immediate opportunities to improve student transitions to university, strengthen baccalaureate production, and enhance students' social and economic mobility, especially for underrepresented populations.

Doing so requires us to recognize transfer as a journey that a diverse and varied group of students undertake.

When we take a more nuanced look at this population, a “transfer continuum” emerges, revealing students at different points along a transfer path: Transfer Explorers, Momentum Students, Students Near the Gate, Students At the Gate, and Transfer Achievers who make it through the gate (see Figure 1).

By using this approach, we can dispel some transfer myths and identify points of intervention that can help propel students further along the continuum. Undoubtedly, students at various junctures encounter particular barriers and require tailored supports. So, what new can we learn from these different groups of students? Who is transferring, who is not, and for what reasons? What can be done to facilitate this transition for more students, at scale?



Figure 1. Transfer Continuum

A “High-Leverage” Transfer Population

Over a recent five-year period, nearly 300,000 students attending CCCs who completed all or most of their transfer requirements did not make it “through the gate” to a university. Our study aims to identify strategies for increasing transfer among these “high-leverage” learners, specifically focusing on the Inland Empire and Central Valley; students in these regions have lower transfer rates, suggesting that they may require unique supports to complete their transfer journey.

What We Know about High-Leverage Learners

Through the Gate’s first phase developed an initial map of students who were well-advanced along the transfer continuum, focusing on a sample of 875,630 CCC students enrolled between 2010-2011 and 2014-2015 and measuring their outcomes through spring 2016. This sample breaks into three groups: students near and at the gate (a.k.a., high-leverage learners), and transfer achievers. What do we know about these high-leverage learners and what can be gleaned from comparing them to transfer achievers?

Students Near the Gate

Students who earned at least 60 transferable units with a 2.0 GPA, but who are missing transferable English and/or math, and have not yet transferred.

WHAT WE KNOW:

Math appears to serve as the biggest obstacle for the vast majority of the 157,000 students who were near the transfer gate, as 92% of these students needed to complete transfer-level math requirements in order to proceed along the path to university. This obstacle remains consistent across gender, race/ethnicity, and region, and signals a clear opportunity to improve transfer outcomes.

We also discovered that time is the enemy of students stuck near the gate. Students who did not transfer within a year of arriving near the gate were less likely to make the transition to university. What supports are required to quickly propel these students to upper-division coursework?

Additionally, nearly half of students who were near the gate left our system without transfer or earning a degree or certificate. How can these learners be helped to secure a credential that signals their readiness for additional education and/or employment?



Students At the Gate

Students who completed the requirements for transfer (≥60 transferable units, 2.0 GPA, and transferable English and math) or achieved an AD-T, and have not yet transferred.

WHAT WE KNOW:

Nearly 136,000 students stopped at the transfer gate. Students stuck at the gate were **more likely to be Latino**, regardless of gender compared to other subgroups. Not only did these students stop short of their transfer goal, **many left without a college credential.** What is uniquely holding these students back from making the transition to university, and how can we assist them in securing a degree or certificate before taking a next step?



Transfer Achievers

Students who transferred to any university, with or without a degree.

WHAT WE KNOW:

Good news: among the students who made significant progress along the transfer continuum, over 583,000 achieved transfer.

Yet, over two-thirds made this transition without a CCC credential, again raising questions about the benefits of, and opportunities for, helping these students secure a degree or certificate that honors their achievements and recognizes their preparation.



INSIGHTS ON THE ASSOCIATE DEGREE FOR TRANSFER (AD-T)

For now, the AD-T seems to be achieving the goal of smoothing educational paths and increasing students' likelihood of transfer to a California State University (CSU). While a small fraction of our transfer achievers completed this degree (~4%), most students in our sample who earned an AD-T transferred (80%). Over the short period in which CCCs have offered this new transfer option, the **number of students earning an AD-T has exhibited an over 3,000% increase.**

At the same time, reason for caution remains. While the volume of AD-T earners is increasing, the **rate at which these students are transferring is trending down.** When taking region, CSU proximity, and major into account, transfer for AD-T earners can become more challenging if they are in a region without several CSUs from which to choose, if they are near CSUs with limited capacity, if they are pursuing a highly-impacted major, or if an AD-T does not exist in their major — all considerations for our CCC and CSU systems as they work together to foster the positive trajectory of this transfer strategy.

The Role of Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Region

We further explored the role of gender, race/ethnicity, and region in the experience of high-leverage learners and transfer achievers. While African-American students were significantly underrepresented in our sample (meaning, many never made it near, at, or through the gate), we **notably found that 75% of the African Americans who made it into our sample of high-leverage learners achieved transfer**, and that both females and males overwhelmingly continued their journey toward a baccalaureate once fulfilling transfer requirements.

Latino males and Native-American females were less likely to achieve their transfer goal compared to other groups. **Latino students were also more likely to earn an AD-T, but halt their transfer journey.**

In terms of region, students in the Inland Empire were least likely to make it through the transfer gate when compared to all other regions, even after meeting all or most of their transfer requirements. These findings indicate an opportunity to learn more about the unique obstacles these student groups face and consider policy and systems change designed to specifically support their progress.

Let's start a conversation...

Here are some prompts to support your own community conversation about the initial findings and how they relate to increasing transfer success in California.

1. What does the transfer continuum look like on your campus (or district or region)?
2. Specifically, which student groups are stuck near or at the gate? Which ones are transfer achievers?
3. What more do you need to know about these student groups in order to further increase their transfer success?

Next Steps: Learning Why High-Leverage Learners Get Stuck and How to Help Them Through the Gate

Through the Gate's first phase defined the transfer continuum, quantified the number of high-leverage transfer students in our CCC system, and began examining how factors such as gender, race/ethnicity, region, and the math and English requirements for transfer impact their journey.

This initial research points to many opportunities for further investigation, including exploring why students who are close to achieving their transfer goal stop short of this transition, what is specifically holding back different student groups, and how we can help them continue their journey to university.

***Through the Gate's* second phase will specifically explore these and other questions by gathering information from students themselves** — securing critical insights that can help refine existing strategies to increase transfer and inform new efforts to improve the success of high-leverage learners. In addition, we will further explore the interplay between race/ethnicity and gender in students' transfer experience and analyze the role of other factors such as GPA, receipt of financial aid, and enrollment status in students' pursuit of transfer as the project continues.

LEARN MORE:

Visit www.rpgroup.org/through-the-gate

Contact Dr. Kristen Fong, Project Director, kfong@rpgroup.org.

The RP Group is conducting *Through the Gate* in two parts:

Phase 1: Mapping the Transfer Landscape (2016 – 2017)

Quantitative research to better understand the transfer landscape for high-leverage learners, determining: (1) how many CCC students arrived at or near the transfer gate, but did not go through; (2) who they are and where they reside; and (3) what we can glean about increasing their transfer success

Phase 2: Getting Better Directions (2017 – 2019)

Qualitative research with students who are ready or nearly prepared to transfer; designed to understand what factors impact their journey and how policy and practice might change to propel them through the transfer gate

